

Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ)



Environmental Justice Fact Sheet

Interagency Working Group

All communities and persons across this Nation should live in a safe and healthful environment.

With these words, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 on February 11, 1994 to establish environmental justice as a national priority. This was the first Presidential effort to direct all federal agencies with a public health or environmental mission to make environmental justice an integral part of their policies and activities. The Order, entitled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," focuses federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions of minority populations and low-income populations with the goal of achieving environmental protection for all communities.

INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP

One provision of Executive Order 12898 established an Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Environmental Justice chaired by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Carol M. Browner and comprised of the heads of eleven departments/agencies and several White House offices. These include the Environmental Protection Agency, the Departments of Justice, Defense, Energy, Labor, Interior, Transportation, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, and Health and Human Services, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Domestic Policy Council, and the Council of Economic Advisors. In addition, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Federal Emergency Management Administration, and the Advisory Council on Historic

Preservation have participated in the IWG.

IWG - TASK FORCES

The IWG had established eight task forces to concentrate on areas that required the most coordination and to assist in developing agency EJ strategies. The task forces were: 1) Research and Health; 2) Outreach; 3) Data; 4) Enforcement and Compliance; 5) Implementation; 6) Native American; 7) Guidance; and 8) Interagency Projects. Each task force was chaired by two agencies with representation from each of the participating agencies. (See table on back)

INTERAGENCY PROJECTS

The Executive Order also directs the IWG to develop interagency model projects, thereby sharing resources and technical expertise to address possible disproportionately high and adverse effects on human health or the environment. Themes of these interagency projects include clinical studies to determine whether patterns of health effects can be linked to disparate environmental exposures to toxins; local community remediation, clean up, and redevelopment efforts; and collaborative efforts to enhance public participation and involvement in environmental decision-making through public hearings, forums, and citizens' advisory boards.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Executive Order provided for the Interagency Working Group (IWG) to hold public meetings to receive comments, questions, and recommendations regarding environmental justice issues.

On January 20, 1995, an Interagency Public Meeting on Environmental Justice was conducted at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. Ten agencies and over 350 people attended the day-long meeting. In addition, an estimated 1,000 people watched the evening session, which was televised via satellite to approximately 40

locations across the nation including Puerto Rico. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for the public to share concerns and recommend changes in the federal agencies' environmental justice strategies. Extensive comments were provided by stakeholders throughout the day. All comments and responses were recorded in a transcript that is available to the public.

In addition, a number of agencies, such as DOT, have held public meetings on EJ and have included participation of other agencies. Several EPA lead programs (e.g., Brownfields, Relocation Policy, National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, etc.) have held numerous public meetings, each having had significant participation from other Federal agencies.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STRATEGIES

The Order directs federal agencies to develop environmental justice strategies. The development of these strategies helped federal agencies identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health effects of their programs, policies, and activities

on minority populations and low-income populations. The Order is also intended to promote none discrimination in Federal programs substantially affect human health and the environment, and to provide minority communities and low-income communities access to information on, and an opportunity for public participation in, matters relating to human health or the environment. The Presidential memorandum accompanying the Order underscores certain provisions of existing law that can help ensure that all communities and persons across this nation live in a safe and healthful environment.

AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

By May, 1996, twelve agency "Implementation Reports" were submitted to the IWG. There Implementation Reports were called for in the EO and related what each agency had done in the first year after submitting their EJ Strategies, to implement those Strategies.

TASK FORCE STATUS AND PRODUCTS

Task Force	Products	Status
Research & Health	final report submitted to IWG 3/24/95- attempts to cover all items from EO	functions of TF are taken over by HHS' Environmental Health Committee
Interagency Projects	final report submitted to IWG 8/95: criteria for good project; some example projects; & suggestions for future projects	sunsetting
Data	Landview II available for sale to public & distributed to Federal agencies; trained 40 Federal employees on its use; prototype data disk completed 6/96 containing Federal data for use in EJ	sunsetting
Enforcement & Compl.	Title VI training for Federal employees - May 1995; final report 4/5/95	sunsetting
Implementation	Produced several products critical to development of the EJ strategies; developed a guide for implementation of strategies	sunsetting/Subcommittee on Policy and Coordination will take over the role of helping agencies implement the strategies
Native American	Status Report 3/24/95; Tribal list; video; Indian environmental organizations list; EJ paper	sunsetting and its functions taken over by the DOI lead Native American Work Group
Outreach	public participation "checklist" w/NEJAC; Atlanta public meeting	sunsetting/any continuing functions will be carried out by the Subcommittee
Guidance	publication of "guidance" for agencies on the meaning of terms in the EO (draft); will be finalized with NEPA guidance	sunsetting

For further information on the IWG or other EJ issues call: 1-800/962-6215